PRRC emerging trends

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Trends in Religious Preference Continue to Evolve Slowly

One would not expect to see religious preferences change radically from year to year, but the final audit for 1990 shows that while the major faiths have maintained their strength relative to one another, subtle changes are continuing to take place in the religious composition of the people of the United States. Overall, 89 percent of adults now state a religious preference. The 11 percent who say they have no preference is the highest figure recorded since Gallup started measuring religious preferences in 1947. This figure should not be interpreted, however, as standing for those who have *no* religion, because it undoubtedly includes some people who are still "shopping around" for a congregation to call their own, or who have eclectic religious preferences, or who belong to a group that is unaffiliated with a particular denomination or faith. The evidence from other surveys suggests that atheists and agnostics together account for a maximum of only five percent of the U.S. adult population.

The majority of Americans are Protestants, with 56 percent naming a Protestant denomination as their preference in the past three years. Protestants have shown a long term decline from their record high of 70

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Religious Preferences

	Protestant	Catholic	Jewish	Other	None
- Yearly -					
1990	56%	25%	2%	6%	11%
1988-89	56	28	2	4	10
1987	57	28	2	4	9
1986	58	27	2	4	9
1985	57	28	2	4	9
1984	57	28	2	4	9
1983	56	29	2	4	9
1982	57	29	2	4	8
1981	59	28	2	4	7
1980	61	28	2	2	7
1979	59	29	2	2	8
1977-78	60	29	2	1	8
1976	61	27	2	4	6
1975	62	27	2	4	6
1974	60	27	2	5	6
- By 5-year Periods -					
1972	63	26	2	4	5
1967	67	25	3	3	2
1962	70	23	3	2	2
1957	66	26	3	1	3
1952	67	25	4	1	2
1947	69	20	5	1	6

Note: Results for some years do not add to 100% because of rounding.

Trends...

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percent in 1962. It is believed that much of the Protestant decline has been occurring among the so-called "mainline churches," while more fundamentalist and evangelical denominations have been holding their own or even growing.

One American in four (25%) is a Roman Catholic by preference. The Roman Catholic faith showed greater strength during the 1970s and '80s, but may now be losing adherents (see accompanying article).

Jewish adherents have accounted for two percent of the adult population for the past two decades.

Records for the four-decade trend are shown on the accompanying table. Specific figures for groups such as the Mormon and Orthodox Churches are omitted because of insufficient historical data, and are included under the "other" category.

Their findings on religious preference in this issue are based on 30,233 interviews with representative nationwide samples of men and women, ages 18 and older, taken throughout 1990. For findings based on samples of this size, one can say with 95 percent confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects could be 1 percentage point in either direction.

It is important to understand that the results are the stated religious preferences of the respondents. Church officials, local or national, often use other criteria in determining membership, and as a result may often show different counts of their adherents and of their representation in the overall U.S. population.

Catholic Membership Dwindling?

Final figures for the Gallup Polls of 1990 show that the religious preference of one adult in four (25 percent) was "Roman Catholic." This represents a three percentage-point drop from 28 percent who claimed allegiance to the Catholic church during the period of 1987-1989. For the past two decades Catholic preference claims have ranged between 27 to 29 percent of U.S. adults. The current 25-percent level in this country is the lowest recorded by Gallup since 1967.

On the surface it would appear that the future for the Catholic church is promising because more young people state the Catholic church as their preference than is true for those who are older. Three in 10 of those who are under 30 years of age (30%) say they are Catholics. Over 30, the proportion of Catholics drops to 24 percent of the adult population, and to 21 percent of those who are 65 and older. Unfortunately for the Catholic church this pattern appears to be an historical constant for Catholics in the U.S. While other faiths and denominations usually have gained adherents as people grow older, the Catholic church historically instead has lost many of its followers. Demographics may be working against the Catholic church in "the greying of America" as the baby boomer population shifts from being predominantly younger to one that is predominantly older.

Regionally, the Catholic church shows greater strength in the East (39%) and Midwest (26%) than in the western (22%) or southern (14%) regions of the country.

When the demographics of Catholics are studied it is found that, contrary to previous images of its lower class "ethnic" origins, the Catholic church in the U.S. now is solidly middle class. It claims a higher proportion of the nation's college graduates (25%) than of its high school drop outs (20%), and more upper-income (28%) households than those in the lowest income bracket (20%).

	1990
TOTAL CATHOLICS	25%
Sex	
Male	24
Female	25
Age	
18-29	30
30-49	24
50-64	23
65 and older	21
Region	
East	39
Midwest	26
South	14
West	22
Education	
College graduate	25
Attended college	26
High school graduate	26
Not high school graduate	20
Annual household income	
$50,000 & over	28
$30,000-$49,999	27
$15,000-$29,999	25
Under $15,000	20

Majority of Americans are Protestants

The majority of American adults (56%) name one of the Protestant denominations as their religious faith. While they may dominate in numbers, the popular image of Protestants, particularly white males ("WASPs"), as members of the American establishment, overlooks the heavy representation of the Protestant faithful among lower-middle and middle-class Americans. Yes, there certainly are many upper-class white males who are Protestants, but they are frequently outnumbered by those from other backgrounds.

More women (58%) than men (54%) declare themselves to be Protestants. Over half of America's whites (56%) are Protestants, and so are three in four of its black citizens (74%). Protestants represent 52 percent of the households that earn $50,000 or more a year, but 63 percent of those with less than $15,000 annual income. Half of the nation's college graduates (51%) are Protestants, but so also are 64 percent of its high school dropouts.

There are so many Protestants in the South (72%) and portions of the Midwest (59%) that the region has come to be known as the "Bible Belt."

Protestantism increasingly attracts adherents as people grow older. Less than half of young adults under 30 years of age declare themselves to be Protestant, but by age 65 their ranks have swelled to 67 percent of the population.

	1990
TOTAL PROTESTANTS	56%
Sex	
Male	54
Female	58
Age	
18-29	46
30-49	55
50-64	64
65 and older	67
Race	
White	56
Black	74
Region	
East	42
Midwest	59
South	72
West	48
Education	
College graduate	51
Attended college	53
High school graduate	58
Not high school graduate	64
Annual household income	
$50,000 & over	52
$30,000-$49,999	55
$15,000-$29,999	58
Under $15,000	63

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Protestant Turnout Was Light in '90 Elections

NEW YORK - Exit polls consist of randomly selecting samples of voters as they leave the polling place and asking them how they voted and about their demographic and behavioral characteristics. These data enable political scientists to analyze how the factors and issues in elections may have influenced various segments of the electorate. In 1990 for the first time the major television networks, together with major newspapers such as *The New York Times*, pooled their resources to conduct exit polls across the country. Over 9,000 voters were interviewed as they left the polls at 245 randomly selected places in the United States and were queried about their votes in the '90 congressional election. The final figures for the exit polls were released this past Summer and show that although Protestants accounted for about 56% of the adult population in 1990, according to Gallup Polls taken throughout the year, but they represented just 45% of the electorate that year. Similarly, only 11% of the voters would classify themselves either as Protestant fundamentalists or as evangelicals. (In recent years over twice as many adults, mostly Protestants, classified themselves in similar ways.) Catholics represented 24% of the electorate, which is close to their 25% representation in the overall adult population. Jews represented 3% of the voters, compared to 2% of the adult population. Protestants tended to favor Republican congressional candidates, Catholics divided their votes fairly evenly between the two major parties, and Jews usually favored Democrats in the 1990 elections.

In what religion were you brought up?

	Total voters	Voted for Democrat	Voted for Republican
Protestant	48%	43%	56%
Catholic	29	31	26
Other Christian	11	11	9
Jewish	4	5	2
Something else	3	4	2
None	3	3	2
No response	2	3	3

Your religious preference today?

	Total voters	Voted for Democrat	Voted for Republican
Protestant	45%	41%	52%
Catholic	24	25	22
Other Christian	11	12	11
Jewish	3	5	2
Something else	5	7	4
None	7	8	6
No response	5	2	3
Fundamentalist or Evangelical Christian	11	8	15

Where Are the Muslims in the United States?

Muslims have been prominently featured by the nation's secular press for the past two or three years because of the events in the Persian Gulf War, their increased presence because of changes in the immigration laws, and because of the striking minarets that have been taking their place on major urban skylines. Frequently accompanying these stories about Muslims are estimates (almost invariably unattributed) that the adherents of Islam now account for two to five percent of the total U.S. population-and growing.

If these estimates were true, they would represent an important development in the evolution of the social and religious fabric of our nation. Jews in recent years, for example, have represented only about two percent of the total population, by comparison. Apart from any social changes, the political impact that a Muslim community that was equal to or larger than the Jewish community would have upon the U.S. could be staggering.

Naturally, Gallup and other research organizations have wanted to examine this growing Muslim presence more closely. However, after a year's attempt throughout 1990 to accumulate a sufficient

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Muslims...

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number of interviews to be analyzed with statistical reliability, there simply were not enough Muslims to be found.

To be exact: only two-tenths of 1 percent of the 30,000 plus respondents interviewed by Gallup in the course of 1990, stated the Muslim or Islamic faith as their religious preference. Even American Hindus, who receive minuscule attention from the secular press, show up at the higher rate of three-tenths of 1 percent. (This difference, however, is not statistically significant.)

Various reasons for the discrepancy between the poll results and the large estimates have been suggested, but have been found wanting. First, there does not appear to be a "house effect;" that is, a bias peculiar to a particular polling firm, because other polling organizations apparently have been achieving similar results in their attempts to find Muslim samples. Language difficulties could lead to some underestimation, but that would not explain why more people declare themselves to be Hindus than Muslims by preference. The Gallup interviews were conducted both in person and by telephone, so that there would not appear to be a methodological bias. Muslims in this country, if anything, generally are considered more upscale and more articulate than average, so that there would not appear to be sampling or response-rate biases present. In the absence of contradictory evidence, we have to go along with the survey evidence, and estimate that Muslims now account for less than 1 percent of the total U.S. adult population.

The illuminated capital letters in this month's issue are from a Sixteenth century alphabet printed in Paris by Jehan de Roigny.

Religion Ranks Low on Scale of Values of Many Prep School Seniors

Private preparatory schools, contrary to past images of austere places where heavy emphasis is placed on chapel attendance and strict moral codes, now are largely populated by students who may often show little interest in religion and who may be struggling to acquire moral guidelines by which to live. Although most American teen-agers (95%) believe in God, only 57 percent of those attending prep schools share this belief. Two teens in three (65%) in the general population think there is life after death, but only 42 percent of the preparatory school students also believe in it. There is a hell where the wicked are punished, according to only 17 percent of the prep school students. Just 29 percent of these students believe "there is a clear moral code established by God."

Most preparatory schools have abolished compulsory chapel attendance in recent years, and as a consequence only one of their students in four (26%) now reports having attended religious services during the seven-day period preceding the interview. Over twice as many teens (57%) from the general population attend services during a typical week, although some may attend because of parental pressure.

The study was conducted among private preparatory school seniors, and nine in 10 reported their values had changed either very much (42%) or somewhat (47%) during the preceding four years of their schooling. Only 10 percent said their values had not changed at all during this period.

The prep school students say they rely most upon their own reasoning abilities (74%), and the views of their parents (70%) and classmates (60%) in developing their ethical, moral and spiritual values. Far fewer identify their teachers (30%) or members of the clergy (6%) as molders of their values. If they had a serious problem, over four students in 10 (45%) say they would turn to one of their closest friends for help. About one in four (27%) would go to one or both of his parents for advice. Only one student in 10 (10%) would seek help from someone associated with his school, and less than 1 percent would turn to a member of the clergy.

Nearly six in 10 (57%) of the preparatory school students say they have a clear-cut set of principles that guide their lives, and even more (78%) say they have a personal code of conduct that they try to follow. When it comes to the future, however, only 18 percent feel they have a very clear-cut set of goals; while 69 percent feel they are going to have to develop the specifics of their future as they go along in life, and 13 percent have little or no idea of their future goals at this point.

Three students in four feel their values are very similar (25%) or somewhat similar (49%) to their parents' values. About two students in three (64%) reject the suggestion that "my parents' ideals are hopelessly old-fashioned."

Nearly half of the preparatory school students (45%) feel they spend more time than other people their age thinking about their values. Only 6 percent feel they spend less time, while 46 percent believe they spend about the same amount of time as others considering their values.

A majority of the students (56%) think their values differ very much from those that were held by students 20 years ago. Prep school students perhaps show a deficient knowledge of history, because they often believe

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Prep School...

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that in comparison to students of the Vietnam era, their peers now are more aware and concerned about international issues, the environment, equal rights, and are more individualistic and liberal! They also point out, however, that AIDS now has a major influence in shaping the values of their generation.

About four prep school students in 10 (43%) say they try to follow a clear set of rules regarding sexual behavior, but a majority (52%) agree that "any kind of sexual activity is OK so long as nobody gets hurt." Young women at preparatory schools are more likely than young men to say they attempt to follow a clear set of rules regarding their sexual behavior, by a margin of 50 percent to 37 percent.

The findings are based on self-administered questionnaires completed during May 1991 by 404 graduating seniors from five private preparatory schools. The study was conducted by The George H. Gallup International Institute for the Institute on Values at St. Paul's School.

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